

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A computer-implemented method for processing featured content, the method comprising:

generating a database query for featured content items;

receiving featured content items in response to the database query;

storing the featured content items in memory;

selecting a predetermined number of featured content items from the featured content items stored in memory;

storing the selected featured content items in a system registry; and

in response to receiving a command from a software application to display at least one featured content item, retrieving featured content items stored in the system registry and displaying the featured content items on a graphical user interface.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the featured content items contain hyperlinks and text data associated with the hyperlinks.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein selecting a predetermined number of featured content items includes randomly selecting three featured content items from the featured content items stored in memory.

4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the method further comprises:

determining if at least one featured content item is stored in the system registry;

if no featured content items are stored in the system registry, selecting a predetermined number of default items from a list of default items stored in memory; and

displaying the data of the default items on a graphical user interface.

5. The method of Claim 1, wherein the displayed featured content items provide instruction for operating a software application.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein the displayed featured content items include data that form an example search string, wherein the example search string is displayed on the graphical user interface with a text entry field for receiving search strings.

7. The method of Claim 1, wherein the command to display at least one featured content item is invoked during the boot process of a calling software application.

8. The method of Claim 1, wherein the query comprises an identifier related to a particular topic, and wherein the featured content items forming the data set have at least one database attribute that is associated with the identifier.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the identifier is associated with at least one computer software application.

10. The method of Claim 1, wherein the method further comprises:  
determining if individual featured content items are out of date; and  
if individual featured content items are out of date, removing the individual featured content items from the memory.

11. The method of Claim 1, wherein the query is configured with a database attribute to filter featured content items based on a value indicative of a rating associated with an individual featured content item.

12. A computer-readable medium containing computer-readable instructions which, when executed by a computer, perform the method of any one of Claims 1-11.

13. A computer-controlled system for performing the method of any one of Claims 1-11.

14. A computer-implemented method of displaying featured content items in a hypertext document, wherein the method comprises:

in response to receiving a request for a hypertext document containing information that describes a topic, generating a database query for a number of featured content items, wherein the query is configured with an identifier associated with the topic;

receiving featured content items in response to the database query;

determining if the number of received featured content items is greater than a predetermined number of featured content items; and

if the number of received featured content items is greater than the predetermined number of featured content items, formatting said hypertext document to include at least one featured content item for display, the hypertext document being formatted to display the data of the featured content item with the contents of the hypertext document.

15. The method of Claim 14, wherein the method further comprises, formatting said hypertext document without the featured content items if the number of received featured content items is not greater than the predetermined number of featured content items.

16. The method of Claim 14, wherein the method further comprises:

determining if one or more of the featured content items has a priority status;

if one or more of the featured content items has a priority status, selecting a predetermined number of featured content items having a priority status for display; and

formatting said hypertext document to include said selected predetermined number of featured content items having a priority status, the hypertext document being formatted to display the selected number of featured content items having a priority status with the contents of the hypertext document.

17. The method of Claim 14, wherein the query is configured with a database attribute to filter featured content items based on a value indicative of a rating associated with an individual featured content item.

18. A computer-readable medium containing computer-readable instructions which, when executed by a computer, perform the method of any one of Claims 14-17.

19. A computer-controlled system for performing the method of any one of Claims 14-17.

20. A method for updating a database of featured content items, wherein each featured content item of the database comprises an attribute that indicates if the featured content item is of interest or not of interest, wherein the method comprises:

determining if a featured content item has expired;

determining if the featured content item is highly rated;

if the featured content item has expired, modifying the attribute to indicate that the featured content item is not of interest; and

if the featured content item has not expired and if the featured content item is highly rated, modifying the attribute to indicate that the featured content item is of interest.

21. The method of Claim 20, wherein the method further comprises:

determining if the featured content item is new; and

if the featured content item has not expired and if the featured content item is new, modifying the attribute to indicate that the featured content item is of interest.

22. The method of Claim 20, wherein the method further comprises:

determining if the featured content item has been displayed more than a predetermined number of times; and

if the featured content item has not expired and if the featured content item has been displayed more than a predetermined number of times, modifying the attribute to indicate that the featured content item is of interest.

23. A computer-readable medium containing computer-readable instructions which, when executed by a computer, perform the method of any one of Claims 20-22.

24. A computer-controlled system for performing the method of any one of Claims 20-22.